



Doing Business In El Salvador: A Country

Commercial Guide for U.S. Companies

Chapter 8: Business Travel

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Business Customs

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Salvadoran business relationships and meetings are, at first, formal. A suit and tie are appropriate for most business meetings. Expect to shake hands before and after your meeting, and do not use a person's first name until a relationship has been solidified. Salvadorans commonly use titles such as Licenciado (meaning a college graduate), Ingeniero (engineering graduate), or Doctor (used both for physicians and lawyers). These are followed by the person's last name.

El Salvador tends to be very much a business card society and it is important upon first meeting someone to exchange business cards with him or her. It is a good idea to have a supply of business cards printed in Spanish.

Breakfast meetings are common and begin about 7:30 a.m. Lunches and dinners can become lengthy affairs (2-3 hours); so do not plan too tight a schedule around them. Dinner starts late by U.S. standards, frequently at 8:00 or 9:00 p.m. Lunch is usually at 12:30 p.m.

Travel Advisory

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The Department of State warns United States citizens to exercise caution when traveling to El Salvador because of the high rate of crime. For additional general or specific travel information please contact: Bureau of Consular Affairs, Office of Overseas Citizen Services (CA/OCS) at 1-888-407-4747, from overseas: 317-472-2328, or the El Salvador Desk, U.S. Department of State, Phone: (202) 647-3505. The Department of State website <http://www.travel.state.gov/travel/elsalvador.html>, offers e-mail safety information updates. Also, the Travel Advisory Service of the Department of State can provide information in recorded and fax form for any travel warnings on traveling to foreign countries. For recorded information contact Tel: (202) 647-5225. To receive a facsimile, call (202) 647-3732.

Visa Requirements

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A visa is not required for ordinary U.S. passport holders. The passport must be valid for at least six months. A tourist card, available for \$10.00, is issued at the airport. Official and diplomatic passport holders are exempt. For non-U.S. passport holders, please consult the following web pages:

http://www.rree.gob.sv/sitio/sitioweb/rree.nsf/pages/svisas_requisitospaisorigen
http://www.proesa.com.sv/visa_req.html

The departure fee is \$32.00, and usually is included in the airline ticket price. Travelers leaving by land do not pay exit taxes.

Consular visas can be requested at any of El Salvador's Consular offices in the U.S.

<http://www.elsalvador.org/embajadas/eeuu/home.nsf/infoconsular>

U.S. companies that require travel of foreign businesspersons to the United States should allow sufficient time for visa issuance if required. Visa applicants should go to the following links.

State Department Visa Website: <http://www.travel.state.gov/visa/index.html>

United States Visa Website: <http://www.unitedstatesvisas.gov/>

El Salvador Consular Section Website:

<http://elsalvador.usembassy.gov/consular/index.html>

Telecommunications

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Following a successful privatization of the sector, El Salvador has over 1,080,083 fixed phone lines. El Salvador is one of the largest cell phone markets in Central America with over 6,137,381 lines as 2007. Direct dialing, fax and telex facilities to most countries in the world are available. Eleven different companies offer Internet connectivity. The mail system is inadequate, but there are many private courier services, such as DHL, Federal Express and UPS.

Transportation

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U.S. airlines with international flights to El Salvador include: American Airlines, Continental, Delta, and United (which operates a codeshare with TACA). The Central American airline TACA has direct flights to and from the main cities in the U.S. Most hotels offer airport shuttle services for their guests, at rates ranging between \$12-\$15 per one-way trip. Visitors commonly drive rental cars and a U.S. driver's license is valid for 60 days. Taxicab services normally provided within the perimeter of deluxe hotels are reliable. Public transit bus service is not recommended.

Language

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Spanish is the official language. English is widely spoken in business circles and by educated Salvadorans. Business travelers may wish to hire a Spanish-speaking interpreter for meetings.

Health

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Travelers can check the latest health information with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, Georgia. A hotline at 877-FYI-TRIP (877-394-8747) and a website at <http://wwwn.cdc.gov/travel/redirect.aspx> give the most recent health advisories, immunization recommendations or requirements, and advice on food and drinking water safety for regions and countries. A booklet entitled Health Information for International Travel (HHS publication number CDC-95-8280) is available from the U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402, tel. (202) 512-1800. Following are some useful health hints: Careful attention to choice of food and beverages helps to reduce the risks. Most well known restaurants in El Salvador serve safe food and beverages, but lettuce, cabbage, and other uncooked ground vegetables should not be eaten, as there is a very high risk of bacterial dysentery and parasitic infection from these food items. As in any part of the world, common sense must prevail. Hot food should be eaten hot and cold food should be eaten cold. Meat, pork, and chicken should be well cooked. Bottled drinks are considered safe. Tap water is not potable. Commercially available water bottled in El Salvador from the Agua Cristal plant has been judged safe for consumption, but be sure the heat-molded seal on the bottleneck has not been broken. Freezing does not make water safe. Avoid ice cubes unless you know they have been made from potable water. All the reputable restaurants in El Salvador use ice made from bottled water and it is considered safe. Contrary to notices occasionally posted in some hotels, water from spigots and other non-bottled sources is not safe to drink. Insect repellent should be used liberally when outdoors. There has been a sharp rise in the occurrence of dengue fever in El Salvador and across Central America.

New Yellow Fever Immigration Requirement for El Salvador Entry/Exit

On March 12, 2008, the Government of El Salvador announced that all Salvadorans or foreigners traveling to, or from, the African continent, or certain countries in South America must have proof of vaccination against Yellow Fever. The vaccination must have occurred 10 days prior to the exit from, or entry to, El Salvador. The new requirement will go into effect on Monday, April 7, 2008.

Travelers going to, or coming from, the following countries/regions will be affected: Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, French Guiana, Paraguay, Peru, Venezuela and the continent of Africa.

The new requirement does not affect travelers who are transiting El Salvador. The U.S. Embassy encourages all travelers to ensure they meet all immigration requirements before traveling.

For further information on the requirement, please contact the Salvadoran Immigration office:

Dirección General de Migración y Extranjería (DGME)
Centro de Gobierno
9ª Calle Poniente / 15 Avenida Norte (Alameda Juan Pablo II)
Edificio Ministerio de Gobernación, San Salvador, El Salvador
Tel.: (503) 2555-7700 or (503) 2555-7777
Website: <http://www.seguridad.gob.sv>
E-mail: denuncias.migracion@seguridad.gob.sv

For further information on vaccinations in El Salvador, please contact the Ministry of Health:

Ministerio de Salud Pública y Asistencia Social de El Salvador
Calle Arce # 827
San Salvador, El Salvador
Tel.: (503) 2221-1001 or (503) 2205-7219
Website: <http://www.mspas.gob.sv>
E-mail: atencion_al_cliente@mspas.gob.sv

For further information on Yellow Fever, please visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at: <http://wwwn.cdc.gov/travel/contentDiseases.aspx#yellow>

Local Time, Business Hours, and Holidays

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Standard time zone: UTC/CMT –6 hours. No daylight savings time. For current time, go to: <http://www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/city.html?n=228>. Working hours in the private sector usually are from 8:00 am to 5:30 pm and in the government sector from 8:00 am to 4:00pm.

The holidays for 2008 observed in El Salvador are:

January 1	New Year's Day
March 20-23*	Holy Week (Semana Santa)
May 1	Labor Day
August 3-6*	Feast of San Salvador (Agostinos)
September 15	Independence Day
November 2	All Soul's Day
December 25*	Christmas Day

*** Salvadoran government offices remain closed for an entire week during Holy Week, Feast of San Salvador Holidays (early August), and between Christmas and**

New Year's Eve. Many offices are closed during the period from December 15 to the end of the first week in January. U.S. firms should not visit the country for business purposes during these periods.

Temporary Entry of Materials and Personal Belongings

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Customs may authorize temporary entry of foreign merchandise with temporary or partial suspension of duties for specific purposes under the condition that they are re-exported within the time authorized and without any modification.

Those who plan to live and work in El Salvador for an extended period will need to obtain temporary residency, renewed periodically depending on the amount of time granted in the residency permit. Under Article 11 of the Investment Law, foreign investors with investments equal to or more than 4,000 minimum monthly wages (refer to <http://www.mtps.gob.sv/default.asp?id=21&mnu=21&ACT=5&content=115>), have the right to receive "Investor's Residence" permitting them to work and stay in the country. Such residency can be requested within 30 days after the investment has been registered. The residency permit covers the investor and his family and is issued for one year, subject to extension on a yearly basis. There are few restrictions on the professional and technical jobs that can be held by foreigners.

Web Resources

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Tourism in El Salvador: <http://www.turismo.com.sv>
Salvadoran Tourism Corporation (CORSATUR): <http://www.corsatur.gob.sv/home.htm>
Tourist Promotion from the Ministry of Foreign Relations:
http://www.rree.gob.sv/sitio/sitiowebrree.nsf/pages/selsalvador_promocionturistica
Salvadoran Hotels Association: www.hoteles-elsalvador.com
Salvadoran Restaurants Association: www.restaurantesdeelsalvador.com
CS San Salvador: san.salvador.office.box@mail.doc.gov

U.S. exporters seeking general export information/assistance or country-specific commercial information should consult with their nearest **U.S. Export Assistance Center** or the **U.S. Department of Commerce's Trade Information Center** at (800) USA-TRADE, or go to the following website: <http://www.export.gov>.

To the best of our knowledge, the information contained in this report is accurate as of the date published. However, **The Department of Commerce** does not take responsibility for actions readers may take based on the information contained herein. Readers should always conduct their own due diligence before entering into business ventures or other commercial arrangements. **The Department of Commerce** can assist companies in these endeavors.